

Frederiksfort, "Bluebeard's Castle"
Bluebeard's Hill
Charlotte Amalie
St. Thomas
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-16

HABS
VI
3-CHAM,
7-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FREDERIKSFORT, "BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE"

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Address: Bluebeard's Hill. At various times also called: Smitsbjerg (Smith's Hill), Taarnbjerget (the Tower Hill), Frederiksberg Estate, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

Present Owner and Occupant: Antilles Enterprises, Inc.

Present Use: Part of hotel: gift shop on ground floor, guest rooms on upper floors.

Statement of Significance: One of the earliest fortifications on St. Thomas, "Bluebeard's Castle" is a good example of a simple 17th century fortified tower. It has been a favorite object with tourists since the 19th century, and the subject of many local legends to this day.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built by the government of the Danish West Indies and Guinea Company and used as a fort until 1735. The Danish West Indies and Guinea Company was taken over by the Danish Crown in 1754, and the tower remained government property until 1818, when the title passed to G. L. Einem. The title then passed from Einem to Cornelious Lemme on 19 September 1818; to David Christian Levy on 20 October 1819; owned by F. Simmons in 1819; from Peter von Vlierden to Alexander R. Liggett on 24 December 1855; to Vincent Piccioni on 5 February 1856; from Piccioni by M. Lucchetti to Mary Elizabeth Daly Smith and Mary F. Brewer; to Eduardo Moron and Nannete Moron on 9 January 1889 for \$6000; to Mrs. Jane Dow Nies on 15 January 1916 for \$6,400; to her husband, James B. Nies, on 30 August 1920 by inheritance; to the Trustees of James B. Nies on 15 July 1925; to the U. S. Government on 1 March 1933 for \$60,000; to the present owners on June 23, 1954.
2. Date of erection: 1688-89.
3. Notes on original plan and construction of building: The tower was originally supplied with 11 cannons

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(seven four-pounders and four six-pounders). It was conceived both as reinforcement to Christiansfort which stands at the foot of the hill, and also as a stronghold that could withstand seige. [Brønsted, Kay Larsen].

4. Notes on known alterations and additions:

The tower served as a fort until 1735. After it was sold into private hands, in 1818, it served as a picturesque focal point to the various estate buildings which were grouped around it, being used at times as a guest house. An inscription above the entrance to the tower reads "Tour de Barve Bleu--Restauree par V. Piccioni 1859" (Bluebeard's Tower--Restored by V. Piccioni 1859). The interior of the tower has been completely remodeled for later uses, but the masonry walls of the building appear to have survived without alteration.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with Building:

At least one authority [Jens Larsen] would associate Frederiksfort with the first Danish expedition to St. Thomas under Governor Erik Nielsen Smidt in 1665-66. However, the most recent and authoritative book, based on extensive documentary studies [Brøndsted] says that the tower was begun in 1688 because of the unsettled conditions brought on by the widespread war in Europe and the recent occupation of Crab Island and Anguilla by the Spanish. Any relic from Smidt's time was incorporated into Christiansfort more likely than Frederiksfort. All authorities listed below agree that the tower was finished in 1689. Christopher Heins was governor during the period of construction 1688-89. In the mid-nineteenth century the tower was known as Luchetti's Castle [Walløe] for the prominent St. Thoman M. Luchetti who was a nephew of Piccioni, owner of Frederiksfort from 1854-65, and a business associate of his. When the United States acquired the tower in 1933 it was part of a program to develop the tourist trade on the Island proposed by the first civilian governor after the 1917 sale of the Virgin Islands to the U. S., Paul M. Pearson, and the buildings on the estate were converted to a hotel. Operators of the hotel during the period it was owned by the Government were: Dmitri V. Starrossalsky, Bernard Krug, Leonard Brewer, and Ruben Barnett. President Franklin Roosevelt visited the Hotel on 7 July 1934. With

the new government administration in 1952, it was decided to dispose of the venture, and the sale to a private organization was effected in 1954. The buildings surrounding the tower have been considerably augmented since the estate was converted to a hotel.

The popular name for the tower, "Bluebeard's Castle," stems from the nineteenth century when many stories, none substantiated, were told connecting the pirate, Bluebeard, with the tower. A number of these legends have been expanded, written, and published, chiefly by Charles Edwin Taylor and J. Antonio Jarvis.

C. Sources of Information

1. Unpublished sources:

Ottley, Aubrey C., "Bluebeard's Tower, A Brief History, 1666-1954," typed, four-page paper in the St. Thomas Public Library. Based on standard published sources, but also contains a list of owners taken from St. Thomas Land Records in Christiansfort, and details on the operation of the hotel. Second prize in an essay contest to mark the grand opening of Bluebeard's Hotel 17 December 1954.

2. Published sources:

Aspinwall, Algernon E., The Pocket Guide to the West Indies (London: Duckworth and Company, Revised edition 1914), p. 371. First edition of 1907 gives much less information.

Brøndsted, Johannes (ed.). Vore Gamle Tropekolonier, Vol. II: Dansk Vestindien. Copenhagen: Westermann, 1953.

Map, "A Description of the Harbour of St. Thomas" by John Jenifer, c. 1687, which shows other landmarks but does not indicate Frederiksfors which was presumably not yet built, reproduced p. 65.

Map, "Nieuwe en aldererste Afteekening van tEyland St. Thomas," drawn May 11, 1718 by Simon de Bon Maison at the request of the Reformed Minister, Isaak Groenewold, published 1719 by Gerard van Keulen in Amsterdam, facing p. 114, shows the tower in place.

Illustrated in a modern drawing by Mads Stage, p. 77. History p. 79.

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Hvass, Tyge. Dansk Vestindien, Vol. VI of Aeldre Nordisk Architektur, (Mogens Clemmensen, Editor). Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1925. History p. 10. Photograph p. 20, fig. 26; measured drawings--plans, elevations, sections,--Plate 1.

Larsen, Kay. Dansk Vestindien, 1666-1917. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1928. pp. 15, 18, 52-3.

Larsen, Jens. Virgin Islands Story. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1950. pp. 8-9.

McGuire, James William. Geographical Dictionary of the Virgin Islands of the United States. (Washington: Department of Commerce, U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Government Printing Office, 1925. pp. 37-79.

Moron, Guido S. "Bluebeard's Castle," St. Thomas Daily News, 17 December 1954. First prize in an essay contest to mark the grand opening of Bluebeard's Hotel 17 December 1954. Contains the most complete account of the chain of title.

Taylor, Charles Edwin. Leaflets from the Danish West Indies. London: the Author, 1888. p. 6.

Walløe, August (ed.). The St. Thomas Alamanack and Commercial Advertiser for 1881. St. Thomas: August Walløe, 1881. pp. 70-71.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
July 1965.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural merit: One of the earliest fortifications on St. Thomas.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. Now maintained as hotel guest rooms. Some exterior masonry left unpainted to retain "old" character.

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B. Description of Exterior

1. Dimensions: Three stories, masonry wall bearing, shortened torus section, 27' x 35', 39' high.
2. Foundations: Rubble stone masonry.
3. Walls: Brick and stone rubble masonry with lime mortar and some lime plaster. Patched with cement. Brick around openings.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Single doorway at grade, masonry arch with recent cement pilasters and small caps either jamb. Brick arch partly covered over with recent cement plaster. Two-leaf wrought iron openwork gate and arch grill.
 - b. Windows: First floor, one window on east side; second and third floors, eight windows each, two in every side. Openings are wooden framed, and have exterior wooden shutters (vertical plank outside, two-frame panel inside; painted light blue); interior single-panel wooden frame shutters with metal screening and adjustable louvers.

Deep reveals in masonry walls are plastered. Wooden soffit.
5. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Flat masonry on wooden beams; top layer of flat brick stretchers laid in herringbone pattern. Recent layer of Fiberglas waterproofing. Low peak wooden sliding trap door over stair well opening in roof.
 - b. Cornice and eaves: None. Three-foot parapet of brick and stone rubble plastered except at 14 narrow embrasures, which are lined with exposed brick.
 - c. Dormers and chimneys: None. Wooden flagpole set in recess in masonry above third level window sills.

B. Description of Interior

1. Floor plan: Approximately oval in general shape or a shortened section of a torus. Long north and south sides flat. East and west sides curved with corners rounded.
Grade level: Vestibule and storeroom. Second and third levels one guest room (called "honeymoon suites") each. North wall at these levels has storage and toilet facilities built in. Closets on either side, shower and water closet with lavatory in the two window reveals, and a vanity in center.
2. Stairways: Recent metal circular stair in one "corner" with a round well from base to roof.
3. Flooring: Concrete at grade level. Second and third floors have 8" square grey concrete tiles.
4. Wall finish: Smooth plaster painted grey.
Ceiling: Timber beams with edges beaded and smooth plaster painted white between.
5. Doorways and doors: All interior doors are modern. (Flush wooden doors with mahogany veneer). Wooden frame doorways.
6. Trim: None; except on storage and bath walls. Wooden moldings around doors; narrow wooden pilasters with bases and caps. Wooden lintel across top. All painted white with mahogany veneer background.
7. Hardware: Wrought iron strap hinges, pintles, hooks, eyes, "S" shutter holdbacks and brackets. Brass latches on interior shutters. Aluminum door hardware.
8. Lighting: Electric throughout.
9. Heating: No facilities.

D. Site

1. General setting: Entrance faces west. Castle is visual center of large spread-out hotel complex with one-story wing connecting tower with two-story "flankers." No circulation connection.

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These and several other buildings in hotel complex built by W. P. A. in 1930's.

2. Enclosures: None pertinent.
3. Walks: Several concrete walks lead from "castle" to other buildings and main automobile entry opposite doorway on west.
4. Landscaping: Hotel area well landscaped with a great variety of tropical plants and trees. Well tended.

Prepared by Frederik C. Gjessing, Architect
and
Philip E. Gardner, Architect
National Park Service
Summer 1958

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FOLLOWS...

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Frederiksfort)
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